

A Dufferin Perspective on Global Climate Change

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From a small farm in Dufferin County to a high rise in the center of Montreal to a United Nations conference which has been described as “simply the most important global meeting ever on climate change”. Not bad for a country girl!

Over the next two weeks I will be attending the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – let’s just call it the Climate Change Convention or CCC for short. During that time I plan to report back to the Banner on this unique and exciting experience. Stay tuned.

The CCC promises to be the most important of its type since the Kyoto Protocol was first negotiated back in 1997. At that meeting most of the world’s industrialised countries agreed to reduce overall greenhouse gas pollution by at least 5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2012. Rick Mercer’s rants about the One Tonne Challenge and all the other talk you may have heard lately about Kyoto have been a result of that agreement.

The Montreal CCC will bring together delegates from 180 countries to discuss the effects of greenhouse gas emissions on the earth’s climate and what countries around the world can do to reduce their emissions. Aside from the delegates, thousands of other people will come to the city to make their voices heard both at the Convention and at various satellite events.

And I will be there to give you the Dufferin County perspective on how these people plan to change the way the world works. I have my badge, my observer status is confirmed and today I ran into a person dressed as polar bear representing the World Wildlife Fund. I feel like an official member of the CCC.

All thanks to my summer job! This past summer I worked in Shelburne as a Team Leader for the Reduce the Juice project. With our project manager Theresa Sauren, Sarah Tratt (another Dufferin County Grad) and I worked with 4 local high school students to convince the town of Shelburne to reduce its electricity use by 5%. If you live in Shelburne you met us at some point over the summer on your doorstep, at various community events or pulling our solar powered snow cone cart down Main Street. Whether it was to save money, for energy security or to help the environment most people accepted the challenge because we met our 5% goal.

The success of that summer project caused a number of other communities to wonder why Shelburne has been so successful at saving energy. Interested parties across the Province want to know about Reduce the Juice and about Power Up Renewable Energy Cooperative or PURE, the community group that organized the project. Eventually that interest reached Montreal and allowed me to attend the CCC as an observer.

Now my experience as an environmental negotiator is a little different than most folks here. Trying to convince somebody on the doorstep in Dufferin County that their 25 year old beer fridge in the basement is costing them big bucks is what I know about. So I was

excited to see how the negotiations in Montreal were carried out (where much more is at stake than a few cold beers). Today with badge in hand I was eager to get into the action at my first session. My suspicions were confirmed: this is tough stuff. And it doesn't help that 5 and 6 languages at a time are part of the debate.

However, one of the events that I feel qualified for is the 'Save Hockey' game being organized by the Youth vs. Climate Change group. When I was younger I remember my brothers and father taking great care clearing and flooding the ice on our pond so that we could play hockey. I was generally the first to get cold feet but my brothers would stay out on the ice with their friends for hours. It was just one of the many pleasures of growing up in Dufferin County.

Why a 'Save Hockey' event at a climate change conference? Because most climate experts predict that global warming will raise the average annual temperature in our area by 3°C. This may not seem like a lot but it is enough to jeopardize many winter sports in Ontario, including outdoor hockey.

I am only at the beginning of my time as an observer at the CCC. However I am learning just how serious and far reaching the consequences of climate change are and will be. It can be a little frightening. But being in the midst of 10,000 people in one place, at one time, all committed to dealing with the problem, gives me confidence. Together we can work to end climate change and turn the tide of global warming. We can do that in Montreal and an international conference and we can start to do that in Dufferin County by getting rid of an energy wasting beer fridge. The only mistake is to do nothing.